The Two Merchants.

66 A RTHUR," said Mrs. Leeman, ad-A dressing her young husband, "It seems to me that Mr. Sharping, is getting ahead of you in business."

"Ah!" muttered the young man, look-

ing up from his paper.

Yes," continued his wife, "he has just moved into his big house, and I expect we shall be invited to the opening."

"And are you not contented here, Sarah ?" asked Mr. Leeman with a slight tinge of disappointment in his

"Oh, yes, I am contented; but then I should like to have you look as wellthat is, to appear as well—as William Sharping does. You are as well acquainted in our town, and as generally respected. Your store is as well situated and you seem to possess all the advantages you could wish. I wish you could keep up with that Sharping.'

Arthur Leeman was a young merchant located in a large flourishing village, where he had been in business nearly two years. He had been brought up by virtuous parents, and his ideas of justice and honesty were founded upon

deep moral principles. Shortly before he entered business for himself he married a beautiful girl whom he had long and apparently loved, and who had in return reciprocated that love. He had received from her two thousand dollars, which sum had gone a great way toward purchasing his

stock in trade. He had rented a small cottage, a neat, retired abode-and here he settled down with every prospect of continued happiness; and this happiness he had a right to expect, for his wife was mild and gentle, loving and true, and ever regardful of his welfare.

His expenses he carefully kept behind his income, and, as might be expected, and made but little domestic show. His comforts were all solid, based upon the single idea of "content."

William Sharping also kept a store in the village. He had commenced about the same time that Arthur did, but he seemed to have made more money, for he spent more money in his living, and as has already been intimated, he was on the point of making a still greater show of accumulating wealth.

Sharping's wife was an intimate friend of Sarah Leeman, and hence the latter felt more sensibly the contrast between her own and her neighbor's outward circumstances.

In a few evenings William Sharping opened his house for the reception of visitors, and of course Arthur and Sarah were invited.

Arthur Leeman was wonder-struck by the appearance of his friend's domestic equipment. The furniture was rich and costly, and the carpets were all of the very finest material. Large mirrors hung upon the walls, golden lamps adorned the marble mantle, and the sumptuous ottomans and sofas offered their temptations to the weary.

"What a splendid house they've got, haven't they ?" remarked one of the guests to Sarah Leeman.

"Yes," replied Sarah.

And as she spoke she thought her interlocutor was drawing a comparison between her own and Mrs. Sharping's domestic establishment.

Sarah heard on all hands praises of the things on all sides of her, and she wondered why her own husband could not do all this as well as Mr. Sharping. She let the spirit of envy drop into her bosom before she was aware of it, and from that moment she became unhappy. She took no more pleasure in viewing the costly articles about her, and at an early hour she drew her husband away from the company, and begged him to go home. When she reached her own anug, neat little sitting room she forgot all the happiness she had enjoyed there. She only thought of the contrast between that and Mrs. Sharping's suberb parlor.

"I'm sure I don't see why we may not make as good an appearance as the Sharpings," she murmured, after she and her husband had become seated.

"I can hardly afford it now, Sarah," returned Arthur.

"But why not as well as William

Sharping ?" "Because Sharping has more money.

He makes more money than I do."

"I don't see how he can do that. He must have some secret in trade that you do not possess. O, I wish we could keep up with them! People will see that Sharping is more prosperous, and they will think him more of a business

man than you are; and if he once takes the lead in trade he will not only be sure to keep it up but also to gain on his competitors. You know how people like to trade at flourishing places ?"

Arthur Leeman began to think there was some force in his wife's argument. He, too, began to lose sight of the sweet "content" he had been for two years enjoying, and instead thereof he was looking for what the world calls plenty.

Before Arthur Leeman retired that night he told his wife he would exert himself to outstrip his neighbor.

A few evenings after that, as Arthur was returning home from his business he had occasion to pass his neighbor's store, and as he saw a light gleaming through the chinks of his shutters, he thought he would enter. Sharping was there alone, and he had just closed his

"Ha, Leeman, how are you? How's business?" cried Sharping with the air of a man who is well pleased with him-

"O, so,so," returned Arthur, reaching over the counter to shake hands.

"I've done capitally to day," resumed Sharping. "A profit of fifty-eight dollars and thirty-three cents."

"Not clear net profit ?" said Arthur, opening his eyes.

'Yes-clear profit. Ha, ha, ha!" and the young merchant thus laughed to himself as he leaped over the counter and rubbed his hands exultingly.

"But I don't see how you did it," said Arthur, in a tone of anxious wistful-

"Ha, ha, ha! What fools there are in this world, Leeman. Just look here,' rattled the successful merchant, as he leaped over the counter and pulled a piece of goods from one of the shelves. 'There-what do you call that?"

Leeman carefully examined the article with an air of one who understands his

"It's made to look like the finest silk," he said, "but the great body of cloth is cotton. I never saw anything like it before," he continued as he drew out a thread and ran it between the nails of his thumb and fore finger, thereby stripping off the flossy silken covering from a stout thread of cotton.

"No, it's a new thing. I got it in New York. Sold a piece this afternoon -fifteen yards-for nine shillings a yard. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nine shillings!" repeated Arthur. in renewed surprise. "Why the stuff is not worth seventy-five cents."

"Bless your body, I only paid fortytwo cents for it. Got it at auction. It's a new thing. Only think of it-off from fifteen yards I made a profit of sixteen dollars and twenty cents!"

"But the one to whom you sold it must have thought it all silk."

"Of course she did. You don't think she'd have paid that price if she hadn't? But mind, I tell you this in confidence. You are one of the trade, you know, and of course up to such things."

Arthur Leeman was not "up to such things," but then he had not the manly independence to say so. A new idea was working its way darkly through his mind.

"You didn't of course tell her it was really silk-pure silk?" he said half carelessly.

"Oh, no!" said Sharping, with a knowing nod. "Let me alone for that. She wanted something rich for a dress-I took down that. "There," said I "look at that-just examine what you want - splendid article - examine for yourself." What do you ask?" she said. "Two dollars," said I. "Too high," said she. "But my dear madam, look at it-I must make myself whole." She begged, I groaned about the ruinous plan of selling below cost. But at last she hit upon nineshillings. "Ruinous," said I; "but if you-if you won't mention it-if you'll promise not to tell of it-seeing it's you-you may take it." She promised and-took it. Ha, ha,

"Sixteen dollars and twenty cents,"

muttered Arthur aloud. "Ay, a good round profit," added Sharping. "But then we must do it: must live, you know; and we might as well have their money as anybody .-They've got it to spare, else they would not spend it.

When Leeman returned to his home he fancied he had learned something .-He had, in fact, learned how William Sharping made his money, and half of that night he lay awake and thought of

The next morning he walked very slowly toward his store. He was still thinking of what he had learned the night before, and was trying hard to silence the "still small voice" that was whispering to his soul.

"It's only business after all," he said to himself. "I may as well get a living as other folks."

It was with these words upon his lips

that he entered his store. His clerk was there and the place was clean and neat. He had been in the store half an hour, and at the end of that time his clerk asked him if he was unwell.

"Unwell? What put that into your head, Henry ?"

"Oh-I thought you looked flushedfeverish. I didn't know but that you might have caught cold."

"No, no, I am well."

Arthur Leeman turned away and wondered if he had been showing all his

Somehow the store did not seem so sprang into his mind. He feared that

cheerful to him as usual. The neatly arranged shelves and boxes, and the choice goods did not look so inviting as was their wont.

During the first part of the day he sold some common articles, such as calicoes, lawns, thread, etc., but it did not occur to him that even here he might have over-reached a single customer. He did not think of getting twelve and a half cents for some of his six penny prints. Sharping did it, but Leeman was not yet initiated.

At last an opportunity was afforded for Arthur to try his newly-discovered plan of business.

Toward night a middle aged gentleman entered the store and expressed a wish to purchase some cloth for a pair of pants. He was a stranger, having but a few days before moved into the

village. "I should like a plece that is good all wool, thick and firm," he said as Arthur led the way to the cloth counter.

The gentleman looked over the goods, and at length his eye hit upon a piece of dark, mixed doeskin. It felt firm and thick, and it was in truth a handsome

"How is that?" asked Arthur.

"I think it will suit me. It seem to be firm and good. Not quite so soft as clear wool generally is.'

"It is an excellent cloth-a few day's wear will soften it," said the young merchant, trying to appear candid. "What is it a yard ?"

"Now, the cloth cost Arthur just thirty seven and a half cents per yard, and he had intended to sell it at fortytwo, and had placed his private mark upon it accordingly. It was just half

"One dollar," said he.

And the words as he spoke them, struck startingly upon his own ear.

"You may cut me off three yards," said the man; and Arthur bid his face as he did the work.

After the cloth was done up the gentleman paid for it-three dollars-it was nearly two dollars more than it cost-a clear profit of nearly two hundred per

Arthur Leeman had always made it a point to be sociable with those with whom he traded,

It was a five-dollar bill the gentleman tendered in payment, and as he passed it over he remarked:

"I suppose that is the lowest you will "It is the lowest I ought to take,"

said Arthur, trying to hide his tremblinguess, for he had done something he knew to be wrong. "Very well," said the stranger; I al-

ways wish to pay a fair living price to every one with whom I deal, always trusting," he added with a smile, "that I shall be treated honestly in return."

He took his change and left the store. Arthur took down his blotter and thought to enter the sale he had just made; but he hesitated. Those pages were all fair and honest. He dared not place there the record of the first dishonest act he had done! O, how he wished the customer had not come!-How he wished he could recall the thing he had done! He had tried the experiment.

"Why, what's the matter, Arthur ?" asked Mrs. Leeman, as her husband drew back from the supper table that evening; "you look unhappy."

"I am unhappy, Sarah," faintly replied Arthur; for he had determined to tell his wife his bitter experience.

"What is it?" anxiously uttered the half-frightened wife, moving to her husband's side and placing her arm around his neck.

"Sit down, sit down, Sarah, and I will tell you."

She did so, still keeping her arm around his neck, and he told her the story of his fall.

"I thought I would try to make money as fast as William Sharping does," he said. "Last evening I was in his store and I discovered his secret. If I disclose it to you you will not tell of

Sarah promised, and then Arthur related to her all that had passed. For a time she was silent. At length

she raised her lips to her husband's face and kissed him.

"Forgive me," she whispered, "for it was I who did this wrong, Oh, forgive me, Arthur. Oh, I would rather live in the meanest rags of penury and want than to live on the wages of my husband's dishonesty! I shall never be envious again. I shall never think of bartering sweet 'content' for my neighbor's 'plenty.' It was I who wronged you. Forgive me."

It was a scene of mutual forgiveness that followed, and that night both husband and wife prayed that they might not heed the voice of the tempter again.

On the next day the first person who came into the store after Arthur arrived was the man to whom the cloth had been sold the day before. The young merchant felt a sudden trembling coming into his limbs, and the worst fears

his wickedness had been detected, and that he should not have it in his power to make free restitution. But he was mistaken. The gentleman had only come for some stuff for lining and facing to the pants he was going to have made. Arthur's heart leaped again, for he should have the opportunity he had hoped for.

"Ah, sir," he said, after the articles just called for had been wrapped up, "I fear there was a small mistake made yesterday, and I am glad you called, for I wish it rectified.

"I was not aware of any," returned

the stranger, wonderingly. "Step this way, sir," Arthur led the way to the counter where the sale had been made, and laying his hand upon the piece of cloth from which he had cut the three yards, he continued :-

"You took a pattern from this piece ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, sir-I was very nervous-very uncomfortable at the time, and I made a sad mistake. I should have asked you but forty-two cents per yard for it. It is part cotton. You may return it and take another piece or I will pay you back the difference, as you please."

He choose to keep the cloth, and Arthur paid him back one dollar and seventy-four cents. He was very thankful for the restution thus made, and remained a long time and chatted with the merchant. He proved afterwards to be not only a good customer, but a valuable friend to Arthur.

That night Arthur Leeman was happy and his sweet wife was never happier in her life, for she had learned the real value of the blessing she possessed, and she had gained once more she had well-nigh thrown from her-the sweetest treasure of life-content.

Time sped on. Arthur Leeman remained strict in his integrity. One by one, customers of William Sharping dropped into his store. They had learned the real character of the dishonest merchant, and they fled from his counter. In course of time Sharping was deeply in debt-his great house was put up for sale. Arthur Leeman bought it, and when he paid for it he had the sweet, holy satisfaction of knowing that every dollar of the purchase money had been honestly earned by fair and virtuous dealing.

Prayer's Certainty.

It would be a great pity if prayer should somehow be abolished. How, then, could we maintain any acquaintance with God? How could two men get acquainted if they sat down together day after day without asking a question or saying a word? The more we know about the laws of nature, the more we ought to feel that He who rules in nature can answer prayer without disturbing nature. Law does not interfere with prayer, but lawlessness would. We pray to One who allows no anarchy in nature. "Oh the inexorable uniformity and unfeeling cruelty of nature!" A good argument against praying to nature, but that's all. Going through a factory we do not say, "Oh machine, do this, or do that;" but we address the one who manages the machine. The machine, like solidity of nature, is one of the negative arguments for the existence of God. Nature is not the God that our souls demand. If it is God's plan to supply men's wants, then it is his plan, also, to answer their prayers; for their real prayers are but the expression of their wants. If it violates law to answer men's prayers, it equally violates law to purposely supply their wants. In fact there is no middle ground between no God and a prayer hearing God.-Ad.

Assured Faith.

In Scotland, in an humble cottage by the loch, old Nancy, an aged woman, worn out with life, lay on her bed, patiently waiting her final summons to go to a mansion in the skies, to a home not made with hands. On the table lay her constant and almost only companions, her glasses and Bible. Among her visitors was a young clergyman, who, listening to her simple words, uttered in childlike faith, felt that heaven was near to him and seemed to hear the joyful cries of the redeemed. One day he said to her: "Nancy, suppose, after all your prayers and watching and waiting, your soul shall be eternally lost?" Nancy with a wistful look, raised herself on her elbow, and with her hand on her Bible, said: "Is that all the far ye hae got me mon? God would lose more than I would. My immortal soul would be lost but God would lose his power and char-acter. If he breaks his word he makes himself a liar, and all the universe will rush into confusion."

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